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Subject Here come the foodies.....

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## Wild salmon need your help

by Ashley Koff

September 14, 2010

Can we have it all? Can we pick and choose between which natural resources we want to protect and exploit without accepting the fact that they are all interconnected? In her thought-provoking piece on Alaska's Bristol Bay and the proposed Pebble Mine, Times reporter Kim Murphy quotes individuals who suggest that you cannot have both; you cannot have one of the world's largest open pit mines in the headwaters of the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery without there being irreversible and costly impacts. I agree.

According to studies, 80-90 percent of salmon's historic riparian habitat in the majority of western states has been destroyed. Thankfully, Bristol Bay's natural ecosystem is still pristine and intact, which is why it boasts the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world. That is also why we must save Bristol Bay. I encourage the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take advantage of the opportunity before them to protect Bristol Bay's salmon while we still can.

As a dietitian, I educate people about the impacts their everyday food choices have on their bodies and their environment. By making informed decisions, we can affect our own health and our planet's health. Bristol Bay is a place where we face a choice that can have long lasting implications on both the health of our society and our environment. You may wonder why I, a registered dietitian practicing in Los Angeles, care so much about a proposed mine in Alaska. For me, it's been an ongoing education process. As I teach my patients, wild salmon is one of nature's perfect foods, a critical source of nutrients that cannot be replaced no matter how hard we try.

And this summer, I made my first trip to Bristol Bay. I traveled with Mariel Hemingway, granddaughter to fly fisherman and conservationist Ernest Hemingway, and together we experienced Bristol Bay's wild salmon, the interrelationship of the animals and vegetation, the quiet, and the people of Bristol Bay: the fishermen, the fly fishing guides, the naturalists, and the "I'm not against mines, just this one" locals who echoed the same message: not now, not ever. Following our trip, Hemingway remarked, "Having come from a family of outdoorsmen and wildlife enthusiasts to experience Bristol Bay and its grandeur has changed my life forever. There are no words for the power of this incredible wilderness and to think that Pebble Mine may threaten such a natural treasure is simply criminal."

As we've witnessed over the last few months, there are costly threats associated with large-scale resource development. We saw human or machine error — an "accident" — occur in the Gulf. Receiving much less attention, but foreshadowing, was the recent copper mine accident in China. Through these tragedies we've been reminded that accidents do happen and it's naïve to assume otherwise. Can we accept that fate in a place as precious and irreplaceable as Bristol Bay?

We don't have to accept accidents in Bristol Bay. We can say "No" when we find that the risk is too great. Currently, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an opportunity to do just that and protect the last best place for wild salmon and defend the people who rely on Bristol Bay for their livelihood and sustenance. Through the Clean Water Act's Section 404(c), the EPA can protect Bristol Bay's most productive and sensitive salmon habitat, ensuring that future generations can continue to harvest and live off of Bristol Bay's wild salmon. While this action would be unprecedented, Bristol Bay is an exceptional place that deserves unprecedented protection.

Consider this your education, which means that you now have a choice and share responsibility for what happens in Bristol Bay, and as a result to the future of wild salmon. By voting with your fork for sustainable seafood and Bristol Bay salmon, you can send a powerful message. You can also take action and join me in contacting the EPA ([www.savebristolbay.org](http://www.savebristolbay.org)), imploring them to use their authority under the Clean Water Act to intervene and protect Bristol Bay from large-scale resource extraction.

Let us not allow a foreign company to take American resources home with them and leave us to suffer the loss, fund the clean-up, and wonder how we got ourselves where we are. Let us learn from the past and protect the future health of our wild salmon and, in turn, ourselves.

Ashley Koff is a registered dietitian (R.D.) who strives to make better nutrition a way of life for all. Koff being named by Citysearch as L.A.'s "Best Nutritionist" three years running and a national media favorite. Ashley can be reached at (323) 251-7537 or [ashleykoffapproved@gmail.com](mailto:ashleykoffapproved@gmail.com).